

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 12739

EXDIS

AMMAN FOR ASST SECY ATHERTON AND AMB GODLEY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINS EG SY SA LE

SUBJECT: APPROACH TO SADAT AND SAUDIS RE SYRIAN
MEDIATION IN LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 15263

1. WE ARE GENUINELY PUZZLED ABOUT SUGGESTION IN
REFTTEL THAT SADAT, TOGETHER WITH THE SAUDIS, WOULD
WORK AGAINST A SYRIAN-ARRANGED SETTLEMENT IN LEBANON.
PERHAPS EMBASSY BEIRUT KNOWS SOMETHING WE DO NOT KNOW,
BUT WE HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE CHARGE THAT
SADAT HAS PREFERRED INSTABILITY IN LEBANON TO A SYRIAN-
ARRANGED TRUCE. WE ARE UNABLE TO JUDGE FROM HERE
WHAT THE PROSPECTS OF THE SECOND KHADDAM MISSION
WERE, BUT THE ARAB LEAGUE INITIATIVE, WHICH FOLLOWED
THE KHADDAM EFFORT, WAS KUWAITI, NOT EGYPTIAN,
INSPIRED. GRANTED THE EGYPTIANS SEIZED UPON IT TO SHOW
THEIR ARAB LEADERSHIP ROLE, BUT THEY WERE UNDER NO
ILLUSIONS ABOUT WHAT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE. SYRIAN
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ABSENCE FROM ARAB LEAGUE MEETING, FOR WHATEVER

REASONS, REALLY MADE THE ARAB LEAGUE MISSION A
NON-STARTER FROM THE OUTSET.

2. OUR READING OF SADAT'S RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS
OF "HANDS OFF" LEBANON IS THAT THESE ARE DIRECTED
NOT AGAINST LEGITIMATE SYRIAN OR OTHER MEDIATION
EFFORTS, BUT AGAINST THOSE HE REGARDS, RIGHTLY OR
WRONGLY, AS ENGAGED IN STOKING OF THE MILITARY
CONFLICT: SYRIANS, SOVIETS, LIBYANS, ET AL.
EGYPTIANS PROFESS TO HAVE INFORMATION THAT SYRIANS,
THROUGH RIFA'AT EL-ASAD, ARE AT ONE AND THE SAME TIME
PROVIDING WEAPONS TO LEBANESE LEFT-WING MOSLEMS (THROUGH
SA'IQA) AND TO KATA'IB (THROUGH TONY FRANGIYA). SADAT
REGARDS THIS TYPE OF SYRIAN DOUBLE DEALING AS COORDINATED
OR AT LEAST CLEARED WITH MOSCOW AND AS DIRECTED AGAINST
THE CAUSE OF PEACE. SADAT IS PRAGMATIC ENOUGH TO
APPRECIATE THAT HIS "WARNINGS" WILL NOT NECESSARILY
STOP SUCH SYRIAN ACTIVITIES, BUT IS ENGAGING IN FAVORITE
EGYPTIAN DIPLOMATIC GAMBIT OF "EXPOSING" IN THE HOPE
THAT THIS MAY CAUSE SAUDIS AND OTHERS TO PRESS
SYRIANS TO CEASE ARMS FLOW. SEEN FROM HERE AT LEAST,
ANY CESSATION OF THE ARMS FLOW TO BOTH SIDES WOULD BE
A HELPFUL FACTOR IN MOVING TOWARD PEACE.

3. THERE IS, OF COURSE, ONE PERIPHERAL ASPECT OF
SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON THAT DEEPLY WORRIES
SADAT. HE IS CONVINCED THAT ASAD IS SEEKING TO
USE SA'IQA IN ORDER TO WEAKEN ARAFAT'S POSITION IN PLO.
THIS SADAT IS TRYING TO PREVENT BY ALL FEASIBLE MEANS
AT HIS DISPOSAL. OTHER THAN HORTATORY
APPEALS TO LEBANESE LEADERS TO SHOULDER THEIR
RESPONSIBILITY AND TO OUTSIDE PROVOCATEURS TO KEEP
HANDS OFF, HE HAS PRECIOUS FEW ASSETS TO MAKE
MUCH OF AN IMPRESSION ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ON LEBANON'S
ORGY OF SELF-DESTRUCTION.

4. AS EMBASSY BEIRUT NOTES, CONTINUING CHAOS IN
LEBANON CONSTITUTES THREAT TO EGYPTIAN INTERESTS.
POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATED EGYPTIANS, INCLUDING SADAT,
ARE STONG SUPPORTERS OF THIS VIEW. LEBANON IS SEEN
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BY GOE AS POWDER KEP. IF IT IS NOT DEFUSED,
AND ESPECIALLY IF IDF SHOULD BECOME INVOLVED, SADAT'S
MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY IS BADLY DAMAGED, AND ONLY
SOVIETS WOULD BE REAL WINNERS. IF EGYPT CHOOSES TO
STAY OUT OF SUCH A CONFLICT, IT WILL BE TOTALLY ISOLATED
IN ARAB WORLD. IF IT GOES IN, GOE-US PEACE PLANS
WILL BE CRITICALLY UNDERMINED, AND GOE-USG
RELATIONS SEVERELY STRAINED. THUS THERE IS NO

QUESTION THAT SADAT WANTS POLITICAL SETTLEMENT
IN LEBANON, WHOEVER THE SUCCESSFUL MEDIATOR MIGHT
BE. POINT IS THAT WITH EVIDENCE HE CLAIMS TO HAVE
ON HAND, HE IS SIMPLY NOT CONVINCED THAT SYRIA IS
PLAYING ROLE OF HONEST BROKER.

5. WE ASSUME THAT WHEN ATHERTON COMES TO CAIRO, HE
WILL AMONG OTHER THINGS WANT TO DISCUSS LEBANESE
SITUATION. WE WOULD STRONGLY SUGGEST, HOWEVER,
THAT HE NOT GIVE THE EGYPTIANS THE IMPRESSION THAT
USG BELIEVES SADAT, BECAUSE OF HIS DIFFERENCES WITH
ASAD, HAS DELIBERATELY SOUGHT TO FRUSTRATE LEGITIMATE
SYRIAN MEDIATION ATTEMPTS. ANY SUCH SUGGESTION
WOULD BLIGHT ATHERTON'S TALKS HERE VERY QUICKLY.
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